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Uncle Columbus

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Uncle Columbus

So the old gambler's dead.
He stuck to the script
and died broke.

I saw him only twice,
the day we buried
my father,

And one night in 1944,
when I was twelve.

He was passing through
on his way to Chicago,
Vegas, LA — God knows,
wherever the horses
and cards were running.

There was an awkward dinner.
He was the "bad apple,"
and Mother didn't want him
in the house.

She went to bed early,
and I sat up with my uncle
waiting for the last bus.

I don't think we said much.
If we did, I don't remember.

But I remember his face
in the firelight, and
that I wanted to kiss him
but couldn't, of course.

I wanted to touch him,
but that wasn't permitted
either.

My father had been at war
two years.

He had my father's face.